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Title: Teaching from the Heart: What Makes a Great School Leader? [Outline]

Authors: Omaira Alam and Seema Imam

Topic of Interest: School Leadership

Track: School leadership for School Heads/Principals/Administrators

Presenters

Omaira Alam currently teaches for the Islamic Teacher Education Program (islamicteachereducation.com). She holds a Masters in Transition Special Education from the George Washington University specializing in at-risk students with emotional and learning disabilities. With over 16 years of experience in teaching and teacher training, she continues her research focusing on Islamic education, special education in Muslim schools, urban Islamic education, discipline with dignity, instructional strategies based on gender and homeschooling. Her blog, Black Board, White Chalk (blackboardwhitechalk.wordpress.com), explores traditional and contemporary issues in education.

Dr Seema Imam is a Course Facilitator for the Islamic Teacher Education Program, a Board Member of Islamic School’s League of America, and Faculty of Elementary and Middle Level Teacher Education at National-Louis University in Lisle, Illinois. She has sixteen years of classroom experience, has served as founding principal of a large metropolitan area Islamic School for five years, and has been serving at the university level as a teacher educator for nineteen years.

Abstract
One of the obstacles towards a school’s success is being able to see the big picture, to be able to convey with clarity where they want to be as an institution, as well as where and what they want their students to be when they graduate. However, in order to be able to do that a school must not only have a sound vision, but school leaders who can carry out that vision. In this session, we will explore the characteristics that make a great school leader based upon the seven Principles of Islamic Pedagogy.

Introduction

The success of an Islamic school is based on a number of factors: great teachers, excellent academic and spiritual program, an Islamic worldview, and a generally uplifting ethos filled with adab and encouragement with room for growth and constant improvement. In addition to these, the one that stands out is a strong and dynamic school leader. This, largely determines the success of the school. It is the vision and fortitude of the school leader that not only sustains a school, but allow for its continual growth and success.

Through the Islamic Teacher Education Program, offered by Razi Education, we are introduced to the Principles of Islamic Pedagogy. These principles developed by Sh Ramzy Ajem and Dr Nadeem Memon, serve as guidelines towards optimum classroom instruction. This is true whether the setting is a conventional classroom or an alternative as found in madaris and homeschool coops.

In this presentation, we extend the application of these seven Principles of Islamic Pedagogy further and apply them to school leaders. This analysis stems from a recent case studies of Islamic schools and their
need for set of standards to guide teaching practice. These principles when applied to principals, other school administrators, school leaders and department heads, take the teaching and learning atmosphere beyond a brick building and into the hearts of students, staff, parents, and, hopefully, the greater community.

We have dissected each of the seven principles to provide the key characteristics that are necessary for a great Islamic school leader. Each characteristic is complemented with a list of practical applications that can be used school-wide.

**Understanding Islamic Pedagogy**

Historically, pedagogy was defined as the “moral education of children.” Its contemporary definition is understood as “the knowledge and art of teaching.” Every teacher has an unspoken pedagogy (i.e. a teaching approach or theory). It can be derived from analyzing the practice of a teacher and if articulated, substantiated, documented and developed it becomes a ‘pedagogy’ in the fullest sense of the word. With this in mind, the process by which the individual Principles of Islamic Pedagogy were developed with deep consideration of the prophetic methodology. A pedagogy is ‘Islamic’ when our method and practice of teaching meets the aims, objectives and ethics of revelation (Quran), represents an Islamic ethos and worldview in a contemporary context, reflects the approach of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) & teachings and proves effective in developing the student in every respect.

**The Principles of Islamic Pedagogy**

Each principle of Islamic pedagogy has three characteristics which make all seven a dynamic set of guidelines suitable for any Islamic educational context. Each principle is comprehensive to govern the specifics of an entire system of pedagogy; gives rise to relevant and authentic implications for teachers, classrooms and schools, and accurately articulates genuine understandings that guide teacher instruction. The sources of the principles come from the Quran; the Sunnah; the students and the inheritors of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him); and the counsel, experience, and works of later scholars of the tradition.

The seven Principles of Islamic Pedagogy are:

1. Conviction of the primal purpose and universal trust assigned to mankind.
2. The primacy of knowledge and of seeking it.
3. The learning environment is sacred, disciplined, caring, and functional.
4. The responsibility to act upon what one learns and teaches.
5. The religious responsibility for self-assessment and accountability.
6. Instruction is in accordance with students’ aptitude, pace and learning style.
7. Formal instruction is occasional, nurtures reflection, and evokes a sense of awe and wonder.

As we delve into the seven principles and their practical implications for school leadership, we must remain cognizant of the multiple and diverse implications of each principle depending on the students, subject, classroom, and school. Given the context of the Islamic educational endeavor, each principle is open to interpretation and reinterpretation.
Principle One: Conviction of the primal purpose and universal trust assigned to mankind

Visionary
School leaders demonstrate clear vision through connection and coherence between religious accountability and implementation of faith through curriculum and in the school setting.

Role Model
School leaders provide strategies that guides teachers through their professional role, religious responsibility, and spiritual significance to the school community.

Principle Two: The primacy of knowledge and of seeking it

Seeker of Knowledge
School leaders prioritize opportunities for learning and growth throughout the school community.

School leaders demonstrate seeking of knowledge through their own personal and professional plans for learning within the school community.

Principle Three: The learning environment is sacred, disciplined, caring, and functional

Dignifying
School leaders promote a culture of learning throughout the school with teacher involvement toward creation of strong classrooms, culture of care, dignified discipline, equity, value, compassion, and mutual respect for individuals based on the religious etiquettes of brother/sisterhood.

Principle Four: The responsibility to act upon what one learns and teaches

Lifelong Learner
School leaders demonstrate teaching in a manner that exemplifies integrity and professionalism through a combination of ‘ilm and ‘amal realizing these qualities include one’s personal life outside of school.

Principle Five: The religious responsibility for self-assessment and accountability

Accountable
School leaders provide leadership throughout the school for planning, goal-setting, reflection, and self-assessment as part of the school and classroom environment.

Reflective Practitioner
School leaders model self-reflection in their own professional practice to improve leadership effectiveness.

Principle Six: Instruction is in accordance with students’ aptitude, pace, and learning style

Cheerleader
School leaders employ strategies that support exploration of one’s teaching and learning styles in order to be dynamic and receptive to the values, social and emotional needs, and interests of individual

Innovator
School leaders support the creation of schools and classrooms that promote a sense of awe and wonder through research-based practices and innovative strategies that motivate student learning.
faculty members and in turn to facilitate teacher focus on the learning needs of the students of the school.

**Supportive**
School leaders encourage teachers to respond to student inquiries in a manner that encourages further exploration.

**Principle Seven: Formal instruction is occasional, nurtures reflection, and evokes a sense of awe and wonder**

**Creating the Checklist**

Once we become aware of the practical implications of the Principles of Islamic Pedagogy, school leaders need to develop a checklist to determine what they are doing, what they are doing well, and what needs improvement.

**Conclusion**

Aligning school leaders with the Principles of Islamic Pedagogy and specifically the practical implications that stem from them, ensures a mutually transformative experience for the school and for the school leader. Developing a checklist leads to visionary excellence and the implementation of strategies that enhance the Islamic learning environment. We encourage school leaders to adopt a set of guidelines similar to the Principles of Islamic Pedagogy that govern accountability for school leaders and teachers. With these in place, Islamic schools can achieve the level of stewardship, educational achievement, and Islamic understanding for its school community that enriches the learning, teaching and administrative experience.
References


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